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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN MUSLIM REACTION TO ISRAEL-LEBANON CONFLICT

¶1. Approximately 25,000 Lebanese citizens reside in Nigeria, according to recent estimates. Since July 31, members of the Nigerian Lebanese community have staged peaceful demonstrations in major Nigerian cities, including Abuja, Lagos, Kano, and Gusau. Participants gathered to highlight the plight of civilians in Lebanon and condemn Israel for its campaign against Hezbollah. The demonstrators carried placards urging the U.N., U.S., and international community to call for a cease-fire. A Lebanese interlocutor confirmed that the protests in Gusau and elsewhere were jointly organized by the Lebanese and Nigerian Muslim communities.

¶2. Nigerian Muslims seem to view the U.S. as the only power capable of halting the attacks on Lebanon, though unwilling to do so. On July 24, the Abuja-based Assembly of Muslims in Nigeria (ALIM) issued a press release criticizing the U.S. for its "double standard policy of hatred exercised against Muslims" and appealed to "Islamic scholars and Muslims to sympathize with the people of Lebanon and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hezbollah)". Friday sermons delivered July 28 and August 4 in mosques throughout Nigeria condemned Israel for its offensive against Hezbollah and accused the U.S. of supporting Israeli "aggression." The influential "Daily Trust" newspaper \*widely regarded as the voice of Northern Nigeria \* published an editorial August 9 alleging that "It is the United States which has allowed the crisis to escalate".

¶3. COMMENT: The crisis in the Middle East is a flash-point issue in Nigeria as elsewhere in the Muslim world. Since the United States is widely viewed as Israel's closest ally and weapons purveyor, any Israeli military offensive tacitly implicates the United States. Increased Israeli incursions into South Lebanon and Gaza, specifically absent any direct calls from the U.S. for a cessation of hostilities, could alienate, even radicalize the Nigerian Muslim community. Despite the peaceful tenor of the protests over the past two weeks, the potential remains for the conflict to attract the sympathies of the wider Muslim community in Nigeria. END COMMENT.  
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